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DEPARTMENT OF RED CROSS NURSING

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One of the first sights that greeted us, as the train halted at the Polish border for the customs inspection, was a group of Red Cross nurses, en route from Paris to Warsaw for service with the health units to which they had been assigned, in the midst of a heated argument with the officials. Miss Hay went forward to investigate and was both amused and a bit annoyed to find that the bone of contention was the stubborn insistence of the customs officials that the heavy "regulation" boots of the nurses must be weighed and entered as dutiable. After a voluble argument in German, Miss Hay succeeded in getting them to see the light and the shoes were admitted to Poland free of duty.

For those of us who have been familiar from our youth up with American hospitals and nursing methods, it is impossible to realize what the installation of a modern nursing system should ultimately mean to the distraught countries of war-stricken Europe. Confronted by problems of disease and malnutrition, so colossal that even an extensive and thoroughly equipped medical and nursing service would find itself hard pressed to abate them, these depleted, devitalized nations are to-day almost entirely lacking the most elementary system of nursing, while their understanding of modern nursing is still very vague. Here and there an individual or a group of individuals has caught the idea and is beginning to stir the soil in an effort to produce for their people what America and England have for many years possessed.

It was only natural, therefore, that the first school for nurses, which was established in Prague under American Red Cross standards, should be the cynosure of all eyes; and that no sooner had this enterprise been securely established than groups of public spirited citizens in Poland set about the task of obtaining our coöperation in founding similar schools in their own land.

Polish Red Cross officials were first to launch this movement and enlist the support of the American Red Cross but, upon a careful investigation of all phases of the subject, it was deemed advisable to have the assurance of the interest of other groups as well. Accordingly, a conference was arranged at which were represented the Polish Red Cross, the Minister of Hygiene, professors from the universities, members of the medical profession, military authorities

and other leading citizens of Poland on the one side, while Helen Scott Hay, Chief Nurse of the American Commission to Europe, representatives of the American Red Cross Commission to Poland, and I, representing the American Red Cross, were on the other side.

For the purpose of gaining first hand information as to the conditions and potentialities of a proper teaching field, Miss Hay and I first made a personal survey of the hospitals of Krakow, Warsaw and Posen at the invitation of the Polish authorities. We were accompanied by Stella Mathews, Director of Nursing, of the Polish Commission, who has been particularly interested in the development of schools.

Krakow had not been included in our itinerary because of our limited time but, due to a railroad strike which was prevailing in Poland unknown to us, we discovered that our through tickets from Prague to Warsaw meant nothing and that we would have to reach the Polish capital via Krakow. Thus we were given opportunity to visit the activities conducted under Red Cross auspices in this picturesque old city.

Several important projects are being directed by the American Red Cross Nursing Service in Krakow: a tuberculosis clinic, including a day nursery and food distribution, and classes in Home Hygiene and Care of the Sick, which are conducted in one of the most ancient hospitals in the country for the benefit of the religious Sisters in charge.

The tuberculosis clinic, which is located in a modern, well-equipped building, was being admirably directed by a Polish physician though, like most of the doctors and nurses, he was obliged to work under most disheartening conditions, the nourishing diet, which is so large a part of the treatment of cases of this kind, being almost hopelessly beyond the reach of the majority of the patients.

Chronic food shortage is one of the most pathetic phases of hospitalization and after-care overseas. While the American Relief Administration was at the time feeding hundreds of destitute children, it was compelled to limit its charity to children under five and had not a sufficient appropriation to permit any general feeding plan. Inasmuch as the worst tuberculous cases at the clinic were above this age limit, the Red Cross had established a diet kitchen to provide for the older children. Plans were also being made to supplement the treatment of the adult patients by food rations, for without such assistance, together with enough warm clothing to fortify the frail bodies against the bitter Polish winter, the physicians were in despair of ever waging anything but a losing campaign against the Great White Plague.

To send patients home lacking both food and clothing, knowing beyond doubt that there was not a possibility of their obtaining either the one or the other, has been one of the heartbreaking tasks the medical and nursing personnel overseas has had to perform in practically every land in that "Zone of Horror" where, Henry P. Davison declares, "civilization has broken down."

Perhaps the most unique classes in Home Hygiene and Care of the Sick which we had ever had occasion to visit were those we found in Krakow's most ancient hospital, where Miss Ayres, an American Red Cross nurse, had organized such instruction for the benefit of the religious Sisters in charge. Great interest was being manifested by the Sisters in this aspect of their vocation. Their only fear was that they might not be permitted to practice on the wards what they were learning in the classroom. "The doctors may not approve," was constantly on their lips. It was a doubt not altogether unfounded, inasmuch as there exists in many European countries a prejudice on the part of the medical profession against the highly specialized nurse. Strangely enough, instead of appreciating the value of intelligent and skilled coöperation, the doctors generally seem to regard such trained service in the light of competition, to be feared and minimized as much as possible.

We found the wards in this Krakow hospital in the most deplorable condition. In many of them, especially in those for infectious surgical cases, we found two patients, inadequately clothed, in the same bed. Dark blankets served for spreads or top sheets. The linen was changed but once a week. Convalescent patients wore no stockings. Most of them walked about the cold floors barefooted, only a few cases have been seen wearing slippers or shoes on their unstockinged feet. Ventilation was only a name and the lavatories were noticeably neglected.

The daily ration of bread was set upon the bedside tables side by side with sputum cups and other utensils, miscellaneous articles of food brought in by sympathetic relatives early in the morning, adding to the sickening *melee*. Patients were permitted to partake of this assortment of provisions whenever they were so inclined. No sick diets were prepared and no systematized method of serving the sufferers obtained. Odors nauseating in actuality and suggestiveness filled the air and flies swarmed over everything, animate and inanimate.

It was such unsanitary conditions as these, all too common in the old hospitals of Poland, that had led her progressive citizens to turn to the American Red Cross for nurses to organize modern schools for nurses' training.

Conditions similar to those obtaining in the Krakow hospital existed in many of those that we visited in Warsaw, though the Hospital of the Infant Jesus, enormous in size and architecturally a gem, presented the opposite picture. This hospital was built by the Russians and is truly splendid in beauty and proportions. It is of the pavilion type, two stories high, and the ward floors are tiled in blue and white and the corridors in brown and white. Here also a religious order was in charge. The Sisters were very progressive and their wards were models of cleanliness. It was gratifying to find linen on the beds and especially to note the spreads marked with the coat of arms of the United States Army. This was due to the fact that many of the military supplies after the armistice were turned over to the American Red Cross and eventually found their way into such institutions as these.

The director of the hospital, a Polish physician and a most delightful gentleman, accompanied us through the hospital. He seemed most desirous that a training school should be connected with his institution, but the chief obstacle to the fulfillment of this desire,—and a very definite one,—was the lack of a school building.

One of the memorable events of our tour through Warsaw was a visit to a most interesting and thoroughly modern children's hospital. Miss Schlenker, a young Polish gentlewoman, had given the money for this charity and was herself its director. It was one of the most magnificent and worth while gifts I have ever seen, and we were interested to learn of the motives which had actuated such generosity. We found that Miss Schlenker had long been tremendously interested in the subject of child welfare, and particularly in the children of Warsaw. She had proved the sincerity of this enthusiasm by beginning a course of training in an English hospital, but had not been able to complete it. The experience had given her a solid foundation, however, for the work she was then doing as director of the hospital.

Not only the hospital proper but all its equipment had been procured with Miss Schlenker's money and not a modern appliance for the care of children, not an up-to-date arrangement for the reception, examination, segregation and isolation of patients had been omitted. Lavatories, tea kitchens and toilets were of the latest and most approved type. Progressiveness and efficiency were everywhere in evidence.

Miss Schlenker, by the way, was one of the members of the Special Nursing Committee organized, as previously mentioned, for the consideration of a modern school of nursing for Warsaw.

There was no school of nursing in connection with this institution, which is supervised by a few graduate nurses and practical

assistants, of whom there are twenty-two. It was our hope to see this hospital used as the teaching field in the care of children, for the nurses in the contemplated school.

Plans for the Warsaw School have now developed to the point where a director has been engaged. This is no other than Helen Bridge, an American Red Cross Nurse, of Barnes Hospital, St. Louis, and more recently an instructor in the Illinois Training School for Nurses. During the year 1920 she served with the American Red Cross Nursing Unit in Siberia. Miss Bridge sailed April 12 for her new duties. Upon her arrival she will begin her work of organizing her corps of assistants who will be provided by the American Red Cross through a gift from a member of the nursing profession in this country. Due to the modesty of the donor, the story of this gift may be only sketched, but every nurse in America will be greatly interested to know that the money for this Warsaw School for nurses' training has been given by a young American nurse who has pledged \$10,000 a year for three years. She has stipulated that her name be withheld. Her particular interest in Poland grew out of a lifelong friendship with a Polish gentlewoman well known in the leading circles of this country and Europe, and it has taken this substantial form of helping a brave people to the realization of their dream of a modern system of nursing.

By means of this financial assistance the Warsaw Training School will be able to boast five nursing organizers: a director, an assistant director, two instructors,—one for practical work in the hospital and one for theoretical work in the school,—and a public health nurse to develop a course in Public Health Nursing in connection with the students' curriculum. A small fund will also be available for miscellaneous purposes, such as equipment, textbooks, etc.

Having motored from Krakow to Warsaw, as the only means of reaching that city because of the railroad strike, in a Mercedes car of the vintage of 1910, but with a high-powered engine, we felt that nothing the Fates might impose in the future could have any terrors for us. This statement may be better understood when it is explained that our Polish chauffeur drove with the abandon one might expect of a chauffeur who had figured as a professional in racing circles of Europe for several years prior to the war.

We motored up to Bialystock in the same mad way, under the same guidance. We made Bialystock, a distance of one hundred and fifteen miles, and back to Warsaw in one day and had time to visit a nursing group that had been sent to that city for the purpose of organizing a special nursing health unit. We found its members engaged in putting the little hospital in order and planning for the

development of a dispensary, special clinics and visiting nursing. Alice G. Carr, an American Red Cross nurse then with the Polish unit was in charge, assisted by Misses Ayres, Lloyd, Rose and Frederick. Miss Rose, a public health nurse, was assigned for the purpose of developing such public health nursing work as might be indicated.

From Bialystock we went to Posen, this time by rail, traveling in a special American Red Cross car which was rather a glorified caboose. At Posen, where the Polish Red Cross was also urging the organization of a school and soliciting participation of the Red Cross, we met representatives of the Polish Red Cross, also members of the medical profession, leading citizens and military officials, and went over the general field. We later submitted in writing the plan on which we felt the school should be organized and the terms which would be acceptable to the American Red Cross before pledging ourselves to participate.

Several of our nurses had been engaged in teaching classes in Home Hygiene and Care of the Sick for the purpose of preparing the Polish aides for military service. No hospital practice was given in this connection, but at the request of the Polish Red Cross the following nurses had been assigned for this duty: Misses MacDonald, Johnson and Sokowitz. Miss Sokowitz is a Polish-American Red Cross nurse.

Before leaving the vicinity we motored out to Kornik, a little village fifteen miles from Posen. Here we called at the Zamoyska Castle, where two of our Red Cross nurses,—both Polish-speaking, Polish-Americans,—were stationed. These were Misses Wartosky and Skorupa, who had taken their training in this country and spoke English as fluently as their native tongue. They were conducting classes in Home Hygiene and Care of the Sick in the little village of Kornik, where they had also developed visiting nursing and a children's clinic.

Count Zamoyska, who had been exiled by the Germans for thirty-four years, had but just been able to return to his ancestral estate, following the German evacuation. He recited with great glee a story of the Red Cross nurses' rowing a boat around the moat, something that had not stirred the placidity of those historic waters for many a year. Like his compatriots, Count Zamoyska was loud in his praises of the American Red Cross and joined the plaudits of the people of Kornik for the work our nurses were accomplishing in Poland.

No doubt the names of the Red Cross nurses attached to the training school at Posen will be of interest to members of their profession in this country; they are: Stella Mathews, acting director, Mary R. Walsh and Emily Skorupa.